Merritt Parkway, Easton Road/Route 136 Bridge
Spanning Easton Road/Route 136 at the 21.87 mile mark on the Merritt Parkway
Westport
Fairfield County
Connecticut

HAER No. CT-102

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Engineering Record
National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior
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HISTORIC AMERICAN ENGINEERING RECORD

Merritt Parkway, Easton Road/Route 136 Bridge

HAER No. CT-102

Location:	Spanning Easton Road/Route 136 at the 21.87 mile mark on the Merritt Parkway in Westport, Fairfield County, Connecticut UTM: 18.637990.4558140 Quad: Westport, Connecticut
Construction Date:	1938
Engineer:	Connecticut Highway Department
Architect:	George L. Dunkelberger, of the Connecticut Highway Department, acted as head architect for all Merritt Parkway bridges.
Contractor:	Paul Bacco Construction Company Stamford, Connecticut
Present Owner:	Connecticut Department of Transportation Wethersfield, Connecticut
Present Use:	Used by traffic on the Merritt Parkway to cross Easton Road/Route 136
Significance:	The bridges of the Merritt Parkway were predominately inspired by the Art Deco and Art Moderne architectural styles of the 1930s. Experimental forming techniques were employed to create the ornamental characteristics of the bridges. This, combined with the philosophy of incorporating architecture into bridge design and the individuality of each structure, makes them distinctive.
Historians:	Todd Thibodeau, HABS/HAER Historian Corinne Smith, HAER Engineer August 1992

For more detailed information on the Merritt Parkway refer to the Merritt Parkway History Report, HAER No. CT-63.

LOCAL HISTORY

In 1648, five settlers migrated west from the town of Fairfield and established homesteads along the Saugatuck River. Residents of Fairfield referred to this region as Green's Farms, because of John Green who settled there. The church referred to this region as the West Parish of Fairfield.[1]

For the next century this rural community grew slowly. By the late 1700s the town was known as Saugatuck. In 1806, schooners started making weekly runs between Saugatuck and New York City. The town developed into a shipping center, with two shipyards. This was due in large part to the Saugatuck River which was navigable farther inland than any other stream in Fairfield County.[2]

In 1824, the parish of Saugatuck presented a petition of civic independence to Fairfield's town leaders. In 1835, the Connecticut legislature created the town of Westport from parts of Fairfield, Norwalk, and Weston.[3]

The arrival of the New York, New Haven, and Hartford Railroad in 1849, further bolstered the economy. "The building of the railroad ushered in a new era. The wharves along the Saugatuck disappeared as did the vessels that had for many years docked beside them. When the new railroad station for Westport was built, several factories opened in the vicinity."[4] Westport remains a manufacturing center to the present day.

The completion of the Merritt Parkway enabled Westport to also become a bedroom community for New York City. Residents actively encouraged construction of the parkway in their town, especially

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[1]Julie Haggeman, "Founding of West Parish of Fairfield." (Manuscript, Westport Public Library Vertical File), 1.

[2]Robert Adams, "Saugatuck History," (Manuscript, Westport Public Library Vertical File, 1968).

[3]Haggeman, 3.

[4]"Westport, Connecticut, a preliminary directive plan," prepared by the Section of City Planning, Department of Architecture, School of the Fine Arts, Yale University, 1947.

when it appeared that the Merritt might follow a more northerly route through the communities of Wilton and Weston. Conflict did arise as the roadway was being constructed. Local business leaders were concerned that there would not be enough exits to give motorists access to Westport's commercial district. These fears were alleviated when the second section of the parkway to open, ended at Weston Road/Route 57, depositing all traffic onto Main Street. Civic leaders were then distressed by the congestion this generated in the business district. The problem was solved when the next link of the parkway opened to the Huntington Turnpike.[5]

BRIDGE CONSTRUCTION HISTORY

Historically, Easton Road/Route 136 was the primary link between the agricultural community of Easton and the port of Westport. The Osborn-Barnes Construction Company of Danbury, CT, received the contract to grade the Merritt Parkway from the Newtown Turnpike to North Avenue, in Westport (ConnDot project #180-55). While Easton Road/Route 136 is located within this section of the Merritt, the grade separation and bridge contract was awarded to the Paul Bacco Construction Company of Stamford, CT (ConnDot project #180-73).[6] The bridge cost $36,655 and was under construction from May 20, 1938, to the fall of that year. The paving contract for this region of the Merritt extended from

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[5]"Westport Wants Entrance at Cross Highway, But Fairfield Opposed," Westporter-Herald, 18 November 1938, p. 1.

"The Newest Plan is For Traffic Leaving Parkway to Use Wilton Road; Those Entering Go Thru Narrow Main Street," Westporter-Herald, 9 December 1938, p. 1.

"Chamber of Commerce to Petition for Routing of Parkway Traffic Via Compo Road," Westporter-Herald, 10 January 1939, p. 1.

"Westport Chamber of Commerce Wants Traffic From Merritt Diverted Somewhere Besides Main Street," Westporter-Herald, 13 January 1939, p. 1.

"Cox Promises to Examine Ramp Issue." Westporter-Herald, 24 January 1939, p. 1.

[6]Contract Card File, Map File and Engineering Records Department, Connecticut Department of Transportation, Wethersfield, CT.

the Newtown Turnpike to Easton Road/Route 136, in Westport. This contract was assigned to the A. I. Savin Company of East Hartford, CT (ConnDot project #180-100). In 1988, all loose and spalling concrete was removed from the Easton Road/Route 136 Bridge then it was patched, sealed, and painted, and had its deck replaced (ConnDot project #170-340).[7]

BRIDGE DESCRIPTION

The Easton Road Bridge is a single-span deck bridge comprising six steel rigid frames that span 48' (see HAER photograph CT-102-1). The Merritt Parkway travels over the bridge at a skew of 44°-38' and at a grade of 1.8 percent, with a clear roadway of 60'. Reinforced-concrete wing walls retain the earth fill from Easton Road. The four walls are 19'-6" long, parallel to the frames, with extensions at one of two orientations. The northwest and southeast walls are 26'-3" long, parallel to the road, and the northeast and southwest walls are 39'-10" long at a 45° angle to the parkway.

Spaced 11'-0" on center, the rigid frames support a reinforced-concrete slab that cantilevers 5'-6" past the outer frames to support the concrete railing. The rigid-frame design allows the engineer to decrease the structural material at the center of the span, thus forming an arched opening. (See the Merritt Parkway History Report, HAER No. CT-63, for a more detailed description of the rigid-frame.) The intrados of the span rises 1'-10" from the springline to the crown, while the extrados follows the grade from knee to knee. The frame thickness at the crown is 18". The outer radius of the knee of the frame is 3'-4". The inside face of each leg remains vertical for a height of 19'-6" above the footing, while the outside face slopes to thicken the leg from 2' at the bottom to 3'-4" at the knee. The legs of

[7]Easton Road/Route 136 Bridge, DOT #731; Bridge Maintenance File, Engineering Department, Connecticut Department of Transportation, Newington, CT.

the frame, encased in concrete, bear on a rectangular, reinforced concrete footing, anchored with swedge bolts. The footings are supported on steel piles driven down to bedrock.

The steel frames are I-sections built up from angles and plates connected with 7/8" diameter rivets. Channel sections serve as cross braces for adjacent frames. Erection drawings indicate that each frame was fabricated in five sections. The leg sections were erected first, then the section with the knee and approximately one-third of the span, and then the middle section. All field connections were riveted.

The Easton Road Bridge is characterized by deep grooves formed in the wing walls, abutments, and parapet. The wing walls step down from the bridge in 2' high steps. A horizontal groove occurs along each wall at the top of a step. This groove is continued on the other side of the pylon at the concrete leg of the bridge span and continues around the corner and under the span. The pylons are delineated by two wide vertical grooves in the concrete and a short step up in the solid railing. The center of the railing is accented by wide joints at a close spacing. Under the railing, the concrete forms a stepped arch that does not hide the steel frame arch.

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Westporter-Herald. 1938-1939.

--------. "Westport, Connecticut, a preliminary directive plan." Prepared by the Section of City Planning, Department of Architecture, School of the Fine Arts, Yale University, 1947.

--------. Contract Card File. Map File and Engineering Records Department, Connecticut Department of Transportation: Wethersfield, CT. This includes construction drawings, copies of which are in the HAER field records.

-------. Bridge Maintenance File. Engineering Department, Connecticut Department of Transportation: Newington, CT.

PROJECT INFORMATION

This recording project was undertaken by the Historic American Buildings Survey and the Historic American Engineering Record (HABS/HAER) Division of the National Park Service, Robert J. Kapsch, Chief. The Merritt Parkway recording project was sponsored and funded by the Connecticut Department of Transportation (ConnDot) and the Federal Highway Administration.

The fieldwork, measured drawings, historical reports and photographs were prepared under the general direction of Eric N. DeLony, HAER Chief, and Sara Amy Leach, HABS Historian.

The recording team consisted of Jacqueline A. Salame (Columbia University), architect and field supervisor; Mary Elizabeth Clark (Pratt Institute) and B. Devon Perkins (Yale University), architectural technicians; Joanne McAllister-Hewlings (US/ICOMOS-Great Britain, University of Sheffield), landscape architect; Corinne Smith (Cornell University), engineer; Gabrielle M. Esperdy (City University of New York) and Todd Thibodeau (Arizona State University), historians; and Jet Lowe, HAER photographer.